



Address-in-Reply to the Governor's Speech

by

Mr Norman Lacy MP, Member for Ringwood

19 June 1973

Mr. LACY (Ringwood). - I am pleased to have the honour of seconding the motion for the adoption of an Address-in-Reply to the Speech of His Excellency the Governor. It is an honour not only for me but also for the people of the Ringwood electorate whom I am pleased to represent in this House. This electorate has been most fortunate up to now to have had as its member the Honourable J. W. Manson, a man who has set for his successor an extremely high standard of local representation. It is my ambition to attain that standard.

I congratulate the honourable member for Bendigo on his speech in moving this motion and I endorse the sentiments he expressed. It is indeed a privilege to have this opportunity, at the beginning of the Forty-sixth Parliament of Victoria, of paying tribute to the distinguished service rendered to this State by His Excellency the Governor Sir Rohan Delacombe, and Lady Delacombe, as well as having the opportunity of expressing our profound loyalty to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Sir Rohan Delacombe, who is the 22nd representative of the Sovereign in this State, completed ten years of service to Victoria on 3rd May of this year, I mention this fact because it is a distinction which he shares with only three others in the history of Victoria - Charles La Trobe, Sir Winston Dugan, and Sir Dallas Brooks. Moreover, it has been a decade of our history which has been more difficult than any other for representatives of the Crown in this country. Many strains have been placed on our relationship with Great Britain. This now seems to be building up to some sort of climax which could for many years to come determine the quality of our association with the Crown.

Sir Rohan and Lady Delacombe have handled their important responsibilities with energy and initiative, and my constituents and I hope they will be able to continue for many more years - at least for the duration of the Forty-seventh Parliament and thereby become the longest serving representatives of the Sovereign in the history of Victoria. They have the experience and the understanding to carry us through this critical time.

The people of the Ringwood electorate would also wish me to express their loyalty to Her Majesty the Queen and the Royal Family. Nations around the world look at this and other Commonwealth nations with envy, for many good reasons. Chief among the reasons for this envy are the character and quality of our first family. There is a value that is enshrined in our relationship with the Queen and her family which many forces in our society would want us to have done with. It is the value of grace - that is free, unmerited favour, or simply giving. In fact, the people of Australia, including Victorians give Her Majesty and her family their place in our society; they are not elected to it; they do not have to strive for it; they do not have to curry favour for it; we give it to them freely and without directives, without conditions. But because we exercise grace on her behalf, she is also free to exercise grace on our behalf. She is free, if she wishes, to use her position of leadership for our benefit. She is free to give to us. The envy of other nations is not only that this gracious system works without engendering strife and creating divisions in our society but also that under Queen Elizabeth II it has worked magnificently to the enormous benefit of us all at a time when country after country throughout the world is discovering that its alternative systems are failing.

The members of the Royal Family are a model of family life in this age of changing values when the institution of the family itself is under severe attack from many quarters. They are a united and loyal family; they are a compassionate and conscientious family; they are an intellectually advanced and a socially progressive family. They take a deep interest in, and make a considerable contribution to the resolution of the problems of modern living. They are constantly under public scrutiny, but not one breath of scandal, such as that which has brought down the first families of many other nations, has been able to touch them. Therefore, because of the value this relationship between us enshrines, and

because of the people the Royal Family are themselves, we are proud to pledge them our loyalty. Long may Queen Elizabeth II and her successors reign over the State of Victoria irrespective of what actions other Governments in this country may wish to take to loosen these bonds of grace.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the Governor for his most gracious speech today, and I take the opportunity of commenting on just one area of his government's proposed legislative program for this Forty-sixth parliament of the State of Victoria.

His speech is historic for its clear expression of the Government's intentions on the plight of a large section of the people of this State, for His Excellency said that –

"full attention will be given to the problems of the physically and mentally handicapped; the underprivileged and the elderly".

This statement will I am sure, be applauded by every honourable member of this House. It represents a significant step in the evolution of a new concern to be found amongst the people of this State - particularly the young - for those whose life is often a daily misery as they struggle for sanity and survival in an otherwise rich society.

Many terms have been used to describe these people and because they have a respectable and somewhat scientific sound they do an injustice to the people they describe. They are variously called "socially disadvantaged", "culturally deprived", and "under-privileged", as well as "mentally retarded" and "physically handicapped" and many other things. However, there has in recent years emerged a refreshing tendency to call these many different minority groups simply the "poor", because that is essentially what they are. They are poor in terms of income; poor in terms of health and housing; poor in terms of education and employment opportunities; poor in terms of political power. In fact, it can be rightly said that "the poor" of our society, because of the apparently fixed nature of their various deprivations, have a culture all of their own which has many definable economic, social and psychological traits. By "culture" I mean a specific design for living that is passed down from generation to generation.

In a paper to the *National Conference on Social Welfare* in 1961 in the United States of America, Oscar Lewis said that by employing this concept of the "culture of poverty" he wanted to -

"draw attention to the fact that poverty in modern nations is not only a state of economic deprivation, of disorganization or of the absence of something. It is also something positive in the sense that it has a structure, a rationale and defence mechanisms without which the poor could hardly carry on. In short it is a way of life, remarkably stable and persistent, passed down along family lines."

Since Lewis's paper, a considerable amount of sociological research has emerged both to support his contention and to delineate the various traits. Some of them are that the poor have a low level of literacy and education generally, that they are not members of trade unions or political parties, that they do not participate in medical care schemes, and that they make very little use of banks, hospitals, department stores and art galleries.

Honourable members are well aware that the Commonwealth is presently pursuing an inquiry into poverty in this country and is receiving the close co-operation of our State Government departments in this endeavour. When the Henderson report is published, the Governments of this nation will have all the data they need to make a concerted attack on this enormous problem.

It is, therefore, fortunate that this area of public concern is one where there can be a clear division of Commonwealth and State responsibilities. Economic planning is clearly within the Commonwealth's scope of activity as the major taxing authority. It therefore must properly ensure that the poor attain economic security through automatically adjusted social service pensions and other benefits. It must also accept the responsibility for the present inflationary explosion which is threatening the nation generally but none more critically than those on fixed pensions.

In this regard it is pleasing to note that His Excellency said today that his Government was pledged to do everything possible in co-operation with the Commonwealth to reduce the rate of inflation. Unless it is checked it threatens to nullify all the expected gains that are to be had from the Commonwealth Government's own new welfare programmes.

Just as it is obviously the Commonwealth's role to provide aid in cash for the poor, it is equally clear that it is the State's role to provide aid in kind; that is, to provide a comprehensive range of services for those who face individual or family disintegration from whatever cause. I am pleased to note, therefore, that His Excellency's Government intends to take a number of strategic steps in the course of this Parliament towards the relief of the plight of the handicapped, the under-privileged and the very old. These are very much the groups which go to make up "the poor" in our society.

Firstly, I mention the Government's decision to establish nine new regional welfare centres similar to those which commenced operation in July last year in Preston and Geelong. These will provide a more localized and less fragmented service to the families of this State and will make it possible for professional staff to be more aware of the particular problems and pressures within certain areas.

Secondly, I mention the Government's intention to carry through the *Mental Health Authority's* five-year plan of expansion and development which will provide an additional 916 beds for the mentally retarded, 20 new day training centres, and a State-wide home-help service to enable mothers of the mentally retarded to be relieved, so that they may be able to pursue a more normal life while keeping the retarded child in the home which, if it can be achieved, is the best possible environment.

Thirdly, the Government's decision to develop the spectrum domiciliary care programme will bring a considerable range of services to the aged in each local hospital area but outside the hospital setting. This will make it possible for our senior citizens to continue more ably to live in a home environment and thereby retain their independence and their dignity.

Fourthly, the Government will build a new teachers' college which will be designed specifically for training teachers of the physically and intellectually handicapped.

In many of these projects that I have briefly outlined, His Excellency's Government will be breaking new ground in welfare programmes. It will therefore, be charting a new course which, if successful, the other States of this nation will eventually follow. For just as in the past Victoria has led the way for the rest of Australia in many fields, including housing and road safety, the significance of this Parliament, I believe, will be that we will be seen, to be leading the way in the provision of new welfare services.

However, the Government of this State must be free to carry out its intentions. Just as the *Hamer Government* has made it clear that it will co-operate with the Commonwealth as it seeks to provide aid in cash to these minority groups, through the provision of adequate pensions and the control of inflation, the *Hamer Government* seeks from the *Whitlam Government* its firm assurance and commitment that it will equally co-operate with the Government of Victoria, by returning our just

proportion of the revenue of this nation without directives or controls, so that it can carry out its clear responsibilities by providing aid in kind through these and other programmes. It is only through co-operation and never through competition that this Federal system of government can work for the eradication of poverty in our society.

For the time being at least that divisive instrument of "election" is over. The litmus paper Federal seat of Casey, and the State seat of Ringwood, which is contained within it and on behalf of which I make these comments today, have turned alternatively red and blue, thankfully for me in that historical sequence. The time has come, therefore to put away this humanely irrelevant analogy by which the political pundits make their predictions and to see this electorate, as indeed all the electorates represented in this House as a community of people, many of whom are living in desperate need - need to which both the Commonwealth Government and the State Government appealed during their election campaigns. These people are looking to us now in hope and anticipation, to act on their behalf. It is therefore the responsibility of both Governments to accept what is good in each other's programme and cooperate unreservedly to ensure that good is brought to its appropriate culmination.

In his novel *Sybil* published in 1845 Benjamin Disraeli made one of his characters declare that Queen Victoria reigns not over one nation, but –

"...two nations between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts and feelings as if they were dwellers in different zones or inhabitants of different planets who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same law -The Rich and the Poor".

If Disraeli were looking on in this Chamber today there is no doubt that he would regard each one of us as belonging to the former of his two nations, and that places enormous responsibilities upon us to ensure that the latter nation "the Poor" have appropriate opportunities of breaking out of the culture of poverty, so that they may begin to benefit from the many other legislative programmes upon which we will consume much time and energy debating during the next three years.

I see enormous pressures in our society pushing our Governments into spending ever increasing amounts of money in areas which in themselves are quite worthwhile, including education, conservation, sport, tourism, and the arts. But this will be of no avail in the cause of promoting the welfare of the people of Victoria or of Australia, if the minority groups in our communities by their poverty are unable to make use of these facilities.

We are seeking first and foremost to build a liberal society in which each individual has the opportunity of achieving fulfilment. This will be possible only when every man, woman and child, irrespective of his social and economic background, or intellectual and physical handicaps, has maximum freedom of choice in his own life.

Therefore, together with our counterparts in the Commonwealth Parliament, we will succeed or fail in our primary objective on the extent to which we are able to obliterate poverty from our society and thereby make Disraeli's two nations one. It gives me great pleasure to second the motion of the honourable member for Bendigo.

On the motion of **Mr. WILKES** (Northcote), the debate was adjourned. It was ordered that the debate be adjourned until next day.